

Dying Wishes by The Stephanois (ballantine)

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Summary:

Steve's been hurt and there's only one or two things he wants before he goes.

Dying Wishes

Author's Note:

- For [PeoplePeel](#).

I just wanted to have some fun with these three at least once more before Season 2, so here's that.

So, getting shot isn't much fun. It hurts like a bitch, actually, and he's pretty sure his sweater is ruined.

Steve's uncle was in 'Nam, and Uncle Leroy loves nothing more than getting loaded at holiday dinners and then regaling all the younger cousins with war stories, the really bloody ones that involved dark, impenetrable jungles and punji sticks and Aunt Gladys shouting about *scaring the children, you good-for-nothing drunk*.

Anyway, that's how Steve knows that if your intestine gets nicked, you're a goner in 15 minutes, *tops*. Which is why he's feeling pretty optimistic right now, even though he's been staggering around in the dark, stumbling against one tree after another and not knowing if the stickiness on his palm is from blood or sap. He doesn't think the bullet hit anything important. Because he's still alive, right? And he's going to remain that way at least until he reaches Jonathan's house to warn him and Nancy that the town's completely gone to hell again.

He kind of loses track of time, thinks he might have walked in a circle or two — all these trees look the same, and it's hard to focus on direction when the sky keeps crackling overhead like end times.

Steve's dad always said the government was no good, but even he probably never imagined his own son would end up killed by the U.S. Department of Energy. That's just nuts.

Eventually he stumbles out of the treeline and onto the Byers' yard. Across the clearing, the house is lit up from the inside with yellow lights. It looks quiet and warm. Steve never thought he'd be so happy to see the most frequent setting for his nightmares, but it's just been

one of those days.

Keeping one arm pressed down against his bleeding side, he shuffles over the wet leaf-strewn grass to the front door. He pounds the door with his free hand and then waits, swaying and shivering. He feels a lot worse, now that he's finally standing still at his destination.

After some amount of time has passed, the door opens. Jonathan stares out at him and after a moment Nancy appears over his shoulder. Her eyes go wide.

Steve smiles at them. It feels a little messy on his face, but that's fine. He's so happy to see them.

"So happy to see you guys," he repeats, and kind of passes out. It's not the manliest thing he's ever done, he'll admit.

When he comes to again a few moments later, he's lying sort of sideways on the sofa. Jonathan's panicked in that subtle way where he sort of looks like a teacher just told him he has to give a speech in front of class. Nancy is kneeling beside the couch and scowling down at him. But she's also got her hand in his hair, so that's all right.

"Why didn't you go to the hospital?" she demands when she sees he's conscious again.

"There was," Steve tries to wave his — *wow*, that's a lot of blood — arm vaguely, "fire in the streets. And I needed to warn you guys."

"Steve," Nancy says. "The whole sky is blood red and the town sirens have been going off for over an hour. We kind of worked out for ourselves something was going on."

He thinks about that. "Oh. Sure, yeah."

He decides not to mention how he wasn't sure, right after the whole got-shot part, whether he'd live and wanted to make sure he saw them one last time. He knows she feels uncomfortable when he gets too sappy.

He tries to tilt his head further towards her hand, but she reads the move all wrong and removes it entirely.

Nancy stands and says carefully, “I’m going to go look for — supplies.”

Steve smiles up at her and lies there in a haze of pain with a totally-not-panicking-Jonathan hovering nearby. A few minutes later she returns with a bottle of shady, possibly-expired painkillers she found deep in the Byers’ medicine cabinet.

Jonathan takes one look at them and shrugs up at her. “What can they hurt, at this point?”

Steve thinks maybe he should’ve gone to the hospital after all. Except there’s the second thing, he needs to tell them about the second thing.

Nancy hands him the pills and a glass of water and supervises until he’s empty-mouthed once more, and then it’s like she can’t stand to be in the room because she’s headed off to the kitchen for some food that might sit well with the pills.

“You okay?” Jonathan asks him quietly, once she’s left again. He seems a little calmer.

“Yeah, sure. ‘Course.” Steve replays that over in his head. He doesn’t think his voice is usually that high-pitched.

Jonathan’s dark eyes flit over him, cataloguing his sorry state. “I have to admit, man, you’re handling this all really well.”

Better than the last time, is what he probably means. Steve doesn’t want to admit that his ability to freak out is substantially weakened due to blood loss, so he just shrugs. And then winces, because *damn*, he really shouldn’t move his upper body, huh.

After a moment he rolls his head along the pillow and meets the other boy’s eyes.

“Look,” he begins very seriously. “There’s another reason I came here. I wanted you guys to know, if I die — ”

Jonathan’s eyes go wide. “You’re not going to die, Harrington, *Jesus* — ”

“If I *die*,” Steve insists, a little annoyed that Jonathan’s trying to steal his thunder. “I want you guys to know — you have my blessing to get it on.”

The room is silent after this grand announcement. Jonathan doesn’t seem to know how to respond, just keeps staring at him. Steve puts his speechlessness down to a potent mixture of grief and gratitude; he’d pat his hand if he could move his arm without blinding pain.

Nancy comes back and doesn’t seem to notice the tension in the room. She takes up her place beside the couch and hands Steve a granola bar, which he accepts with a wet smile.

“What’s wrong?” she asks Jonathan, noticing that his expression looks slightly more uncomfortable than normal, which is to say: *very uncomfortable*.

Jonathan’s eyes skitter between her and Steve. He opens his mouth and then shuts it again, shaking his head. It’s so sad, Steve thinks. The guy’s like a helpless lamb. A helpless, lonely lamb who’ll never grow up to be whatever a male sheep is called, at least not without outside assistance.

His thoughts are starting to fragment a little and he’s feeling kind of woozy. God, this might be it for him.

“I have to know you guys are gonna be alright,” he tells Nancy. She nods, rote response, but doesn’t look up from where she’s pulling gauze and tape from the Byers’ first aid kit. And he thinks, that’s no good, this is urgent business. “I think if you guys just kissed once in front of me, I’d rest a lot easier.”

That brings her head up real quick. She darts a look at Jonathan like she can’t help it. Whatever she sees there lets her continue on to Steve with a tolerant expression. “If you were anyone else, I’d double-check the strength of those pills.”

“Does that,” Steve starts. He licks his lips. “Does that mean you guys aren’t going to kiss?” Disappointment settles over his chest. He’d wanted to go out with a pretty view.

Nancy says, "Now let me get a bandage on you. Then we're going to get you into Jonathan's car and to a hospital before this graze gets infected."

Graze! Steve decides she's just trying to be strong and reassure him.

Meanwhile, Jonathan scrubs a hand through his hair and offers him a weak smile. "We'll discuss this later, how about that?"

Steve is kind of offended that Jonathan actually thinks he's going to believe him. As if everyone at Hawkins High School doesn't know Jonathan's middle name might as well be "Avoidance".

He huffs a breath and it turns into a gasp as Nancy starts to put pressure on his wound with the gauze. When she's done, the two of them prop Steve up like a marionette between them and walk him out of the house. They're both warm and solid under his arms and it somehow makes him even more tired, like he knows he can flop down and let them control the strings.

They lower him carefully into the passenger seat of Jonathan's car. He fetches up against the window, head fallen limply back and eyes on the red sky overhead as the other two get into the car.

"If your little brothers don't save the day this time, you guys are really going to regret not kissing," he mutters.

Jonathan glances into the rearview mirror and meets Nancy's eyes. After a moment, he rolls them and sighs and then he's pushing his seat belt behind his back and leaning over the gearshift.

The hand on the back of Steve's neck is gentle but the lips are decidedly not. Steve is too startled not to kiss back, because he's a polite guy like that.

Jonathan backs up a few inches. "Will that hold you over until we can get you medical attention?"

When Steve glances at Nancy in the back seat, she's biting back a smile and trying to look at him in serious inquiry. He doesn't understand how this all got so turned around, but at the moment he's willing to go with the flow of things.

“What the hell, Byers. I thought all the teachers said you were good at following directions.” He can’t stop the grin pulling at his lips though. To cover it, he nods at the road. “Now come on, get me to the hospital. I could be dying here.”